

Sermon
Brooke Prentis
South Yarra Community Baptist Church
Sunday 4 October 2020

Bible Readings

Leviticus 25:1-17

Psalm 112

Romans 16:17-20

Matthew 13:34-35, 10-17

Well it is wonderful to be here with you today. I do acknowledge that I am a Waka Waka woman, a visitor on the lands of the Gadigal peoples. I also acknowledge that I grew up on Gubbi Gubbi country. I also acknowledge that I zoom in virtually to the lands of the Boonwurrung and Wurundjeri peoples. These virtual moments for me in acknowledging country have been special as the acknowledgement of country travels over so many nations. So I pay my respects to all Elders and Leaders of the over 300 nations of Aboriginal peoples right across these lands now called Australia. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to Uncle Den Fisher.

So here we are in the year 2020. And here we are together at South Yarra Community Baptist Church – today our stories weave together in this very moment. As Common Grace we have been on the journey with Christians all across the world joining in for the Season of Creation. I know SYC Baps have also been on this journey. So it is wonderful as an Aboriginal Christian Leader and the CEO of Common Grace to join you on the last Sunday of the Season of Creation and on this the Feast of St Francis of Assisi day.

We have gathered.

We – a family, We – a faith community, We – the church, We – Christians and followers of Jesus, We – society, We – a nation, We – the world, We – the peoples, We – all of creation, We – Country, Country in the Aboriginal way.

And so who is we?

As Aboriginal peoples of over 300 nations we know community is not whole when one is missing or injured or sick – the interconnectedness of community. We know Country and it tells us and reminds us of the interconnectedness of all of creation of which peoples are just one part. We know interconnectedness of the social, political, economic, and ecological – pre-colonisation, all in rhythm with each other – one is not prioritised at the expense of another. This interconnectedness is taught by the Creator, passed down through our Elders, through the generations.

As Aboriginal peoples our Elders teach us that when the land is sick the people are sick – in these lands now called Australia we, Aboriginal peoples, Torres Strait Islander peoples, and non-Indigenous peoples of all cultures, are dealing with a sickness of over 250 years.

And so here we are in the year 2020 - in the face of a global pandemic, a global climate crisis, and the global black lives matter movement. Many people have described the current times as turbulent or disrupted.

But for me, as an Aboriginal person, this disruption didn't start in 2020, it started 250 years ago – our wait for a “new normal” is 250 years long. I long for my peoples normal before the impacts of colonisation.

And so in the year 2020 with the words, teaching, and call of many Aboriginal Elders who say, “Care for Country and country will care for you”, we turn our minds, hearts, and hands to Jubilee for the earth.

First a word on Country. Country is not just land. Country is not just peoples. Country is all lands, waters, sky, trees, plants, animals, fish, birds, mountains, rocks – and all peoples.

Second a word on what I articulate about Aboriginal ways of being, doing and knowing. Most Aboriginal people today are Christian. You won't find one Aboriginal person, Christian or non-Christian that does not believe in the

Creator unless they aren't identifying and connected to their culture. For me that Creator is Creator God, the same Creator that is in Genesis 1, as some Aboriginal Christian Leaders say, "Genesis 1 is the greatest Aboriginal Dreaming story ever told." So if you read any Aboriginal dreaming story it will tell you one of three things, Who the Creator is, how to care for creation – that's all of country, and how to live in right relationship. These to me are also three Biblical mandates.

I also say Aboriginal peoples are custodians appointed by the Creator. We are part of God's story in these lands now called Australia and always have been. When you understand the true history of the lands now called Australia you know it is a miracle Aboriginal peoples have survived. That is God's miracle and we are still here for a reason.

I'm going to mainly reflect on Leviticus 25 but I was struck by how each of today's bible passages are also so interconnected to this message. So I ask that after today, as you meditate on these words that I share, to go home and meditate on these four Bible passages, and try to read the Bible, as I echo the call of Uncle Rev Graham Paulson, to read the Bible with Aboriginal eyes. Look out for mandates of who the Creator is, how to care for creation, and how to live in right relationship.

I have reflected a lot on Leviticus 25 during September 2020 and this Season of Creation. There are a number of different parts of me that reflect on this passage – there's the Brooke that is a Chartered Accountant by profession – one of only 22 Indigenous Chartered Accountants in all of Australia

So I must confess that the numbers in Leviticus 25 say a lot to me. There may have been part of me that wanted to do some maths, extrapolation, and financially modelling. Only joking. Maybe?

But putting that aside, there is the Brooke that is an Aboriginal person, the Brooke who also has a non-Indigenous heritage, and the Brooke who is a Christian. But actually my reflections aren't the different segmentations of myself to be thought about differently, but are to be thought about as whole,

for all of us, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous peoples of all cultures in these lands now called Australia.

Leviticus 25 brings me into the present in these lands now called Australia in the year 2020.

2020 is 250 years since Cook came a shore at Kurnell. If we take the 50 year periods in Leviticus 25 literally, this year is now the 5th opportunity for consecration and Jubilee. As we near the end of 2020 I fear it is another missed opportunity. With the lived daily reality of injustice for my peoples, Aboriginal deaths in custody, stolen wages, the lack of closing the gap, the lack of Treaty and treaties – the words “proclaim liberty” and “return to your land” and “everyone is to return to their property”, make my heart sad, my prayer unceasing, and my actions more urgent.

Let alone, that the passage talks about selling and buying property, so where does Stolen Land, and the blowing up of sacred sites, the destruction of mining and deep sea oil drilling on creation against the wishes of Traditional Owners, fit into this as verse 17 rings in my ears “Do not take advantage of each other”.

When I look at Australia in the year 2020, I see a land out of balance, where people hear in Welcome to Country and from our Elders – “Care for Country and Country will care for you” but profit and greed is put before caring for creation. I see economy being put before environment. I see politics before love for our neighbours. As an Aboriginal Christian Leader, I see daily the ramification of serving Mammon and not God, sometimes they feel like ramifications that started 250 years ago and continue today.

One of the other things I say is I can't separate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice from Creation and Climate justice.

So will we repent and turn from putting profit before the planet and people and turn to honouring our Creator and loving our neighbour.

We are called into a new rhythm, perhaps even an ancient rhythm.

A call I hear in my heartbeat, in your heartbeat, my sister's heartbeat, my brother's heartbeat, my neighbour's heartbeat.

It's the heartbeat of Country.

We hear it in the whisper of the breeze,

We hear it in the crash of the wave on the beach,

We hear it in the rustling of the gum leaves.

We hear it in the laughter of the kookaburra,

We hear it in the screech of the homeless cockatoo,

We hear it in the magpies good morning warble.

We hear it in the cries of the black-throated finch.

We hear it in Yam Island in the Torres Strait watching the seas rise.

We hear it in Warlpiri country sitting in the hot desert sun.

We hear it in Wurundjeri country from the winds on the mountains.

There is a stirring in the lands, the waters, the hearts of the people.

It's the voice of Great Creator Spirit. It's been calling to us since time immemorial, through thousands of years, through 250 years, and today in the year 2020. This new but ancient rhythm is calling us to come together. I pray the we includes you.

Together we feel less tired, and less alone. As I look around the zoom room of South Yarra Community Baptist Church I see diversity. As I look around Common Grace I see diversity – diversity in a movement of people pursuing Jesus and justice. Both being here with you today, and being part of the Common Grace movement, help me feel less tired and less alone as my hope and prayer is that we act together for the common good, discover common ground and share in common grace – that grace that God shows to all without distinction – the non-discriminating, all inclusive power of God's love that is reflected in the goodness of creation. When we have unity in diversity we see God's beautiful tapestry of humanity – woven together with the tapestry of all of creation – in our common home – God's beautiful Earth.

In 2019, I collaborated with singer / songwriter Helen Wright on a lyrical poetry piece called a "New day".

The final lines of my poetry call to us at the end of Season of Creation 2020. Calling us into Jubilee for the Earth – new rhythms and new hope.

*The old ways dawn on a new day.
Fresh eyes and open hearts.
Our stories weave together,
Shared truth, the new way – That's how it starts!*

And together, we step into, a new day, a new day.

May that new day be one we step into today, together, with Jesus, loving all our neighbours – peoples, lands, waters, trees, plants, animals, birds, fish, mountains – and where together we can proclaim liberty and jubilee for the earth.

Lord may it be so.